

Spadina Avenue

by Rosemary Donegan
Introduction by Rick Salutin
Vancouver, Toronto:
Douglas and McIntyre, 1985

REVIEWS

Although I welcome this book very much, I wanted to begin by returning to an argument I made when reviewing the exhibition: 'I can say in advance - it is central to my argument - that no book can have the effectivity which the exhibition, in that place, had.'¹ Jane Weinstock, reviewing the 212 page documentation of a post-partum document - Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*, also raises this as a question:

What happens when this Art becomes a book? Does its fetishistic quality vanish when Kelly's found objects are no longer available, when they are mere reproductions? How does the *Document*'s meaning change as it passes from the Art Market to Art Book/Theory Market? Does its status as serial work, as work which refuses to become discrete, disappear when it is assembled with a permanent binding? And how does the viewer/reader's position change when he/she is able to contemplate the *Document* at close range over a long period of time?²

Recently I have become obsessed with two related themes: cultural pedagogy and the questions that cultural production asks us/differently, *if we listen*. In reviewing Rosemary Donegan's exhibition I spoke about the murmuring produced, I believe, by her montaged display and organization. I am beginning to see another sense in the term 'talking cure' which is simultaneously freed from the dyadic situation of psychoanalyst and the subject who speaks *and* involves some transversality between looking and viewing and listening and hearing. I think there are forms which silence, which exclude -- there is a violence in this silence and I think there are re-arrangements which *pose* questions. There is another connection here with Mary Kelly (and, of course many others) insofar as she has worked to show shifting. As Jane Weinstock puts it on the same page I quoted from this productive cultural pedagogy 'presupposes a viewer/reader who is constantly shifting from foot to foot.' This is a practice where a montage produces in/forming uncertainty, questions that invite our work of making sense differently.

Although I think the book-form cannot so comprehensively accomplish this, I want to extend my celebration of the exhibition to the book as, precisely, a document of/from the exhibition to which it has an indexical relation. The book tries to sustain the senses of Spadina as a street printing Peter MacCullum's sequence of out-takes from Front Street to Spadina Crescent at the foot

of the pages. After Rick Salutin's 'Introduction' (of 25 pages) which has received much attention in other reviews each page -- and often each opening -- montages other photographs and reproduced or newly produced texts, including oral history statements. As with another exhibition (which I helped curate) translated into a book -- the long sequence in John Berger and Jean Mohr's *Another Way of Telling* which also produced the shifting, uncertainty, questioning and a hubbub of viewing, the translation here reduces some of the productivity of the materials and instruments we are provided to think and feel with. But, more so than with the Berger/Mohr exhibition and, again, closer to the different content of Mary Kelly's work, the loss in this translation is the senses, sensualities and sensibilities made possible in the earlier installation. Notably, streets are not 'known' (embodied) like, for example, maps -- cartography is different from knowing (and also not knowing) our different ways around. Streets have two sides, in this case the two sidedness is emphatically known as we walk the street.

But of course with a book there can be a *closer* study -- and that special easy 'gentle' apocalypse, when knowledge is made festive' called sharing a book with another person, sitting together and turning the pages, flipping back, moving forward, returning, talking and enjoying all the while. There is that other sharing where books can be loaned, given, with enthusiasm -- precisely 'offered in love'. There is thirdly also the ways of reading done alone, intensely -- with a passion, in a context, murmuring, exclaiming recognition, feeling joy, anger, pain -- feeling a sense of having been there. I would want to affirm these embodied sentimentalities as a deliberate transgression of the too abstract, too total, discussion of books as commodity-things, as exchange-objects. Again, I want to recall that people use cultural products.

The book does not entirely lose its liveliness compared with the exhibition, or rather, perhaps, there are different knowings which this form founds and makes possible. One is the ability to examine and be surprised by the openings, by the page by page display -- to listen carefully -- and to return and return. But I respond in a curious way (it may be due to the stillness of books, as well as due to problems of scale and space which I have mentioned) -- somehow, and I think this maybe what Jane Weinstock also means, as

a book there is both less sense of the work of the cultural production that was so much *there* in the exhibition presentation and, relatedly, the book does not draw our attention -- making us stop and listen -- to the pervasiveness of our visually mediated world.

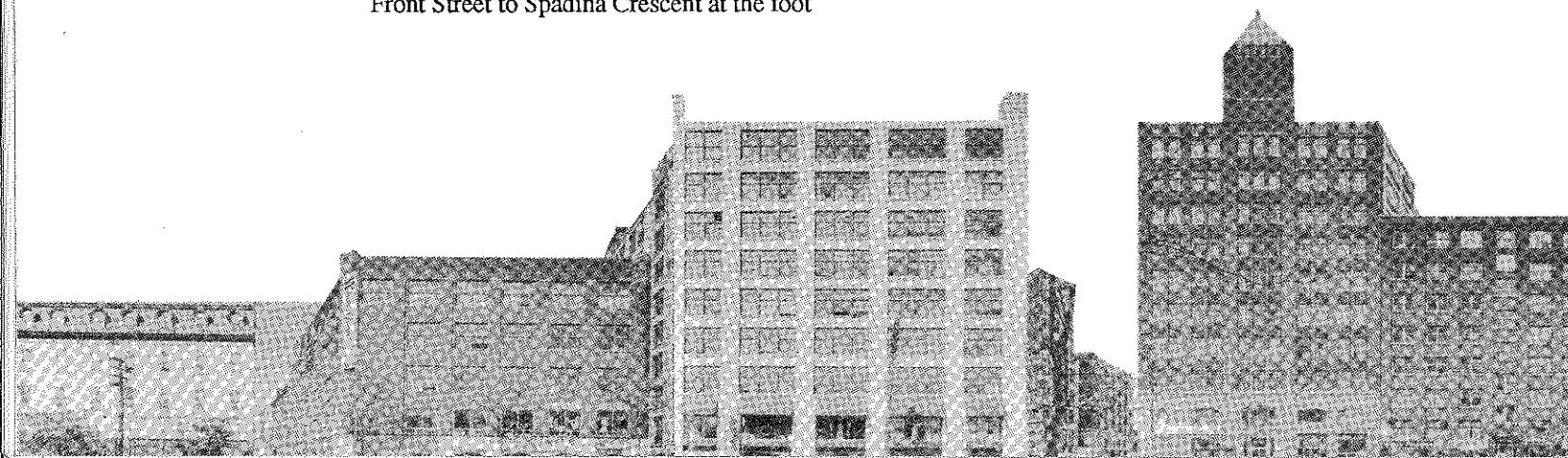
But it is good to have the document, which is excellently designed/organized and will be (as it already has been) productive socially, culturally and thus politically. Spadina Avenue sings and struggles through.

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1. *Parachute*, (37) 1985 p.46. My review of the exhibition there involves an argument about photographic work also returned to in 'In/formation' *Photo-communiq  *, Fall 1985. Some resources for developing the metaphor of viewing as listening can be followed through R. Barthes 'Listening' in his book *The Responsibility of Forms* (New York, Hill & Wang, 1983); J. Berland: 'Contradicting Media' *borderlines* No. 1 1984, 'Sound, Image and the Media' *Parachute* (41) 1986.

2 J. Weinstock 'A Post-Post-Partum Document' *Camera Obscura* (13-14), p1 60. I am very grateful to Marion McMahon for drawing this issue to my attention and form much productive conversation regarding film/photographic work in relation to re-membering.

3 London, Readers and Writers Co-operative, 1982. There both Berger and Mohr talk about their shared practice of images-and-texts, as they have also done in relation to *A Seventh Man*. Berger's recent book - *Our hearts, my love, as brief as photographs* (New York, Pantheon, 1984) is a wonderful texting montage with a lot to say about our different losses inside 'civilization'.



Peter MacCullum